

Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales*, a Jacobite Romance

Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales* (1716) is a little-known prose romance that tells the story of an Irish princess, Dooneflaith, and her love for Murchoe, the son of a rival king. Set against a carefully edited history of the Viking wars from the ninth to eleventh centuries, the work ends with the triumphant expulsion of the raiders from Ireland after the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. In the preface the author cites a long list of historical sources that she claims were consulted in the creation of the narrative and which she uses as a pretext for a spirited defence of Gaelic or native Irish culture. This pro-Gaelic, historically-grounded approach is strikingly unusual among the few works of Irish prose fiction produced at this time, which tended to depict the native Irish in stereotypical or openly hostile terms in the decades after the Glorious Revolution of 1688.¹ The anonymously-authored prose romance *Vertue Rewarded: or, an Irish Princess* of 1693 is perhaps the closest formal comparison to *Irish Tales*. Set during the campaign of the future William III in Ireland, the 'princess' of the title is, however, a member of the contemporary protestant planter class while the native 'wild Irish' are depicted as savages. Other popular works with Irish themes from the period include fictional 'rogue biographies' such as *Teague O'Divelly; or, the Irish Rogue* (1690) and *The Wild Irish Captain, or Villainy Display'd Truly and Faithfully Related* (1692) that equate Irishness with criminality, albeit of a comic variety. Far from condemning the Irish as brutes or villains, Butler sets out to correct the dominant narrative concerning her country and its people, portraying the pre-Norman Gaelic Irish as cultured and sophisticated, an 'instructive' example for the readers of her day.

¹ For more on the development of prose fiction in Ireland in this period see, Derek Hand, *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24-33.

In the introduction to the recent edition of Butler's *Irish Tales*, Ian Campbell Ross, Aileen Douglas, and Anne Markey argue that under the cover of a conventional romance Butler's narrative had clear contemporary resonances in 1716, only a year after the failed Jacobite rebellion.² Given this context, the choice to set the work during a historical period that featured staunch Irish resistance to foreign invaders and one of the few major military victories in Ireland's long history of defeat and conquest feels undeniably political.³ Yet, as Cliona Ó Gallchóir has noted, the primacy of the invented romance, which ends in tragedy, complicates any narrow allegorical reading of the text as Jacobite wish fulfilment.⁴ Indeed, given that a much greater share of the narrative is devoted to the romance, the reader would be justified in concluding that, however provocative, the historical implications of the setting are of secondary importance. Clearly, the interaction between text and subtext, fact and fiction in this work is less straightforward than it might at first appear. This article will outline the overlapping but distinct national and international contexts of early-eighteenth century Jacobite culture that helped shape this seemingly anomalous work. It will thereby suggest that rather than working against a Jacobite reading, the romance narrative in *Irish Tales* and the work's politicised historicity represent an

² Ian Campbell Ross, Aileen Douglas, and Anne Markey, introduction to *Irish Tales: or, Instructive Histories for the Happy Conduct of Life*, by Sarah Butler (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 9-30.

³ Ireland played little part in the 'Fifteen', as Jacobites called it, in spite of protestant fears in the lead up to the rebellion, and historians long believed that Irish Jacobitism ceased to be a significant factor after the Treaty of Limerick in 1691 (see, for example, J.G. Simms, *Irish Jacobitism*, and S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island*). However, the past couple of decades have seen a re-assessment of this view with cultural historians like Breandán Ó Buachalla and Éamonn Ó Ciardha, among others, uncovering a wealth of Irish-language Jacobite material from the post-revolution period that shows the continuing political relevance of Jacobitism both within Ireland and among the continental Irish diaspora.

⁴ Cliona Ó Gallchóir, "Foreign Tyrants and Domestic Tyrants: the Public and the Private and Eighteenth Century Irish Women's Writing," *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008), 27-31.

innovative redeployment of existing Jacobite modes. Moreover, as I shall argue, Butler's distinctive manipulation of the form of the romance shows *Irish Tales* to be part of a strand of Jacobite culture that produced a wealth of work by women during this period.

As a genre, the Jacobite Romance shared many features with its historical forerunner, the Royalist Romance, such as a preoccupation with themes of constancy, sovereignty, and exile. Like its predecessor it portrayed aristocratic heroes and heroines of inherently noble character and, regardless of the nominal setting, used a recognisable courtly idiom and aesthetic, though for Jacobites this was increasingly a nostalgic ideal. The romance was also, more generally, a mode through which Jacobites made sense of their changing fortunes. The logic of recurrence that governed the romance helpfully foretold the defeat of their enemies and a return to the 'natural' Stuart order.⁵ However, this desire among Jacobites to restore an idealised, hierarchical age embodied in the person of the true sovereign took on a poignant significance as time and distance rendered this restoration less likely. The repeated deferral of the realisation of these hopes in the real world introduced a searching, self-reflective quality into the Jacobite Romance, which reflected the anguish of abortive typological cycles and the absence of legitimate leadership as much as the hope for its renewal. Nonetheless, the black and white moralism of the romance provided a framework through which Jacobites could interpret the evolving ideological battle they faced in the decades after 1688. Replacing the religious extremism of the Puritans, the accession of William of Orange ushered in a new age of commercialism that would achieve a more lasting social revolution by restructuring British culture

⁵ Murray G. H. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 9-12.

around the middle class values of industry and progress.⁶ This inevitably cast Jacobitism as reactionary or regressive by comparison, at least in Britain. In Ireland, where the fault-lines were more strictly sectarian in nature, Jacobite culture became identified with the disenfranchised Catholic majority regardless of class. Butler's choice of the elitist genre of the romance therefore sets her apart from the majority of Irish Jacobites.

In a quirk of literary history the circumstances that inspired the Jacobite nostalgia for the conservative social vision epitomised by the romance also made possible a potentially progressive discourse that treated disenfranchisement not as shameful but as noble or even edifying. The archetypal Jacobite narrative concerned the 'prince across the water' and his long-suffering 'lover' (representing the faithful Jacobites) who awaited his return. This meant that Jacobite culture was centred, paradoxically, around the absence of a strong male hero. Out of these conditions a female-oriented narrative tradition emerged that focused on the constant lover, with the promised consummation of the romance signifying the restoration of the true sovereign.⁷ Courtship and marriage, once merely the means to reward the male hero of romance, became the primary field on which the battle of values played out. In this way, the Jacobite embrace of a positive construction of marginality through the figure of the steadfast female lover had the secondary effect of opening up a sympathetic space in which women could explore their experience in society. Writers as diverse as Aphra Behn, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood, Delarivier Manley and Mary Astell, among others, exploited features of this mode. Indeed, the prevalence of Jacobite-inflected writing by women in Britain, especially in comparison to their Whig

⁶ See, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁷ See, Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 86.

counterparts, has long been recognised as a feature of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century literary landscape.

For those awake to the implications, the Jacobite tropes and allusions encoded throughout *Irish Tales* signified its roots within a culture that clung on and even flourished in various clandestine forms across Britain and Ireland during this period. In Ireland though Jacobite culture was concentrated in the Gaelic-speaking Catholic community traces of the Jacobite idiom have been identified in the works of protestant writers like Swift, Berkeley, Goldsmith and even Burke in recent years. Published in the major metropolitan hubs of London and Dublin, Butler's work demonstrates how clever positioning could allow Jacobite writing to hide in plain sight. Although Butler herself is a mystery, aside from the fact that she had died before her work could be published,⁸ her surname would have triggered an immediate association with the Duke of Ormonde, James Butler, whose name was synonymous with the Jacobite cause.⁹ Further circumstantial evidence surrounding the publication of *Irish Tales* also encourages a Jacobite reading of the text. Butler's publisher, the disreputable Edmund Curll, produced a number of high-profile Jacobite works during this period, including Barker's romance *Exilius* which appeared the year before *Irish Tales*. Aware of Curll's cultivation of this niche market, the initiated reader, browsing amongst his latest offerings, would have opened Butler's slim duodecimo volume to see a title page which listed among the 'tales' in the volume, 'II. The Banish'd PRINCE', 'VI. The Constant FAIR-ONE', and 'IX. The Depos'd USURPER' (33).

⁸ News of Butler's death is relayed in the dedicatory epistle by Charles Gildon, which is written in honour of the proudly Hanoverian Earl of Lincoln. This might be considered a strike against the Jacobite reading but, as Ross et al. note, he demonstrates little familiarity with the work beyond its title (16-17).

⁹ The Duke of Ormonde, perhaps the most powerful Irish noble at the time of the 1715 rebellion, was widely believed to have supported the Jacobites. He was impeached on charges of high treason and fled to France.

For Jacobites, these titles would immediately have signalled the text's political allegiance, as they allude to some of the key thematic touchstones of Jacobitism in the period: exile, loyalty, and sovereign legitimacy. Curiously, the text is not in fact divided up into separate tales in this manner, though they do map on to the general shape of the narrative. It therefore appears to be a deliberate choice on the part either of the writer or publisher to frame the narrative, a distillation of its principles designed to establish its affiliation at a glance.¹⁰ This careful positioning implies that it was not designed solely to speak to or for the marginalised Irish Jacobite community but to reach Jacobite audiences across the two islands and perhaps even as far off as those exiled at the court of the 'Old Pretender' in France. The fact that it was published first in London and in the form of a prose fiction romance, a genre that had little native appeal in Ireland, indicates Butler's ambition. Notwithstanding these efforts to attract a wider Jacobite audience, *Irish Tales* is also deeply concerned with obscure issues of historical identity that were of little interest beyond the shores of Ireland.

As previously mentioned, in her preface Butler specifies the wide range of historical material, both British and Irish, she consulted in creating the work, elevating the text's formal relation to history to conspicuous prominence.¹¹ Despite this show of even-handedness, however, the text relies heavily on one historical source in particular, Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, which existed only in manuscript form until its publication in English translation in 1723 as *The General*

¹⁰ Curll habitually included the full list of 'tales' when marketing the work, such as in his catalogue of books printed in 1716 and the catalogue of titles in the back of volume II of the *Entertaining Novels of Mrs Jane Barker* published in 1719, where it is listed under the alternate title, *Milesian Tales*.

¹¹ Butler cites historians of the native Irish tradition, such as 'Dr Keting (Seathrún Céitinn or Geoffrey Keating), 'Flahertus' (Roderic O'Flaherty) and Peter Walsh, but also historians of the British tradition, including Edmund Spenser and 'Hanmor' (Meredith Hanmer), who were hostile towards the native Irish. See, Ross et al, 17-20.

History of Ireland. Butler's access to this work places her within the orbit of what remained of the Irish Catholic elite.¹² Written in the turbulent years of the 1620-30s *Foras Feasa* is one of the defining works of Irish historiography in which Keating, an Old English Catholic of Norman decent, promotes the idea that true sovereignty and Catholicism were inextricably linked. Keating's influence on Butler's historical vision can be seen in her reference to the Irish as the "Milesian Race" (39) in her preface. Curll, presumably recognising the significance of the phrase among Jacobites, reprinted the work under the title *Milesian Tales* in 1719. The mythic Milesian lineage of the Irish people located the origins of the Irish in the Mediterranean region rather than in Northern Europe, the source of the English. In the late-eighteenth century the myth acquired proto-nationalist importance, but in the early-eighteenth century it had particular appeal for Jacobites. Keating, as part of his political manoeuvring, granted Charles I a 'Milesian' heritage by integrating the forebears of the Stuart dynasty into the annals of ancient Irish royalty.¹³ As such, the Stuarts became part of the same royal line as Brian Boru, the hero-king of 1014 who appears as Bryan Boriagh in *Irish Tales*. In the Jacobites' cyclical reading of history, Boriagh's victory against the Vikings thus comfortingly prefigured the downfall of Ireland's present day illegitimate conquerors, with the expelled Vikings acting as typological antecedents.¹⁴ Butler's seemingly obscure historical allusion was therefore heavy with political freight for Irish Jacobites.

¹² Ross, "'One of the Principal Nations of Europe': the Representation of Ireland in Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7, no. 1 (1994): 6-7.

¹³ Bernadette Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 126.

¹⁴ Underlining the myth's political relevance to Irish Stuart supporters, a Limerick man in exile with the Jacobite court published a Milesian genealogy of the Stuart dynasty, Matthew Kennedy's *A Chronological, Genealogical, and Historical Dissertation of the Royal Family of the Stuarts* (Paris, 1705). Ó Ciardha notes that a Milesian genealogy of the Stuarts, perhaps Kennedy's, was seized in 1713 as

Even so, Butler's conspicuous citation of historical sources does not translate into an accurate reproduction of that history, which is considerably distorted in the narrative.¹⁵ Ross et al. argue that Butler's sleight of hand in shaping the narrative suppresses many instances of internecine violence during the period of the Viking wars, a change that is designed to strengthen the narrative of Irish defiance.¹⁶ Certainly, Butler simplifies and streamlines the events of an era that was in reality messy and full of reversals of fortune. Yet a number of historical instances of intra-Irish conflict are retained and even expanded upon in the latter part of the work, enough to muddy any positive message of national unity and strength. Complicating things further, tyranny is not just the preserve of the 'foreigners' in *Irish Tales*; the Irish themselves display despotic traits. In fact, as the work progresses Dooneflaith and Murchoe's fathers, including the great Boriámh, emerge as the prime obstacles to the lovers' happiness, sacrificing their children's desires in favour of a narrow and ultimately destructive self-interest. For Ó Gallchóir, Butler's restructuring of the historical timeline ultimately serves not a political message but the mechanics of a plot that explores the tension between public duty and private virtue.¹⁷ It would seem that to interpret *Irish Tales* as Jacobite propaganda would therefore necessarily involve devaluing the importance of the romance.

Contrary to the common conception of the romance as a 'light' feminine form devoid of political import, Butler's choice of genre would have been imbued with distinctly partisan connotations for contemporary readers. Indeed, certain

sedition material in Mallow, Co. Cork. See, Ó Ciardha, *Ireland and the Jacobite Cause: 1685-1766, a Fatal Attachment* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 126.

¹⁵ Apart from the invented romance, Butler combines events from the reigns of two kings named Maolseachelvin (Malachy) who lived more than century apart. See, Ross et al, 25.

¹⁶ Ibid, 26-7.

¹⁷ Ó Gallchóir, 32-5.

developments in the romance back in the seventeenth century had helped firmly identify it with the political fortunes of the House of Stuart. Though there was a long and illustrious native tradition of the romance in Britain, in the 1630s Charles I's wife Henrietta Maria brought with her a new kind of romance from the French court on their marriage. The *préciosité* style of romance emphasised love over martial adventures and put a contemporary feminine spin on the traditional chivalric values of moral behaviour. In Nigel Smith's words, the fashion, focused around the Queen, "always reeked of popery and the most effete courtliness."¹⁸ While few British authors wholly adopted the French style,¹⁹ it nonetheless exerted considerable influence on the perception of the romance in Britain, which became intimately associated with the Frenchified culture of the Stuart court in the public's imagination. During the years of the Civil War the romance would acquire a more charged political dimension. As Lois Potter has shown, the public attitude towards the Stuarts had become so bound up in the language of romance that by the mid-seventeenth century writers both for and against the monarchy identified the tropes of romance as a form of pro-Stuart code.²⁰ While the coded genre of the Royalist Romance was formed to some extent out of political necessity in the crucible of the Civil War years, this merging of the political and the aesthetic came quite naturally, since the moral universe of the romance already reflected the Stuart ethos.²¹

¹⁸ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 241.

¹⁹ The convoluted romances of Madeleine de Scudéry, perhaps the most influential of the *précieuses*, reached truly epic lengths which few in Britain replicated. Smith cites Roger Boyle's six-book romance *Parthenissa* (1651-69) as one of the few attempts (244-6).

²⁰ Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660*, Reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 72-80.

²¹ The most prominent Royalist Romances in this period were all written by men, for example: Sir Percy Herbert's *The Princess Cloria*, published in various forms between 1653 and 1661; Richard Braithwait's *Panthalia* of 1659; and Sir George

The Stuarts of the Restoration era would follow Charles' lead by self-consciously aligning their public personas with chivalric symbolism, knitting together history and romance in their dynastic mythology.²² The literature that embraced this romanticised Stuart mythology operated by exploiting an allusive mode that Annabel Patterson has called the "functional ambiguity" of language to comment on the politics of the day while avoiding any explicit, and therefore dangerous, statement of ideas.²³ This mode allowed for the publication of fictionalised responses to the incendiary events of the period like the Exclusion Crisis, the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion, and James II's flight to France in 1688.²⁴ The indirect nature of these commentaries can, however, make them feel frustratingly elusive. Moreover, while Restoration and Jacobite era romances were written from within the imagined community of Stuart loyalists and imbued with a shared symbolism, their relationship with the Stuarts themselves was a complex one, making the decoding of deliberately-obscured meaning even more difficult.

As one of the most prominent women writers of the Restoration, Behn's devotion to James II and the Stuarts is well documented, and her work of prose fiction *Oroonoko* (1688) has been interpreted as an indirect commentary of the death of

Mackenzie's *Arete* of 1660. For more on the politicisation of the romance during and after the Civil War see, Paul Salzman, *English Prose Fiction, 1558-1700: A Critical History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 148-76.

²² For more on the self-conscious use of romance imagery by royalists and Jacobites see, Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, rev. ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), and Pittock, *Material Culture and Sedition, 1688-1760: Treacherous Objects, Secret Places* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

²³ Patterson, 18.

²⁴ For example John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) is widely read as a response to the events of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. See, Richard Lewis Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots: Sexual Politics and the Body Politic in English Literature: 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 168-76.

Charles I.²⁵ Richard Knoll, however, argues persuasively that it is an urgent typological warning directed at James II, written as it was in the summer of 1668 when the king's position was growing ever more tenuous.²⁶ While *Oroonoko* straddles generic categories it exhibits features of the Royalist Romance, relating the trials of an African prince, Oroonoko, who embodies the chivalric values that had come to be identified with the Stuart dynasty. Though it involves the very real horror of slavery, the narrative structure is built on the age-old foundations of the romance: young love, obstacles to that love, and a heroic prince's need to prove himself. However, Behn subverts the conventional ending of the romance in favour of grim realism, as Oroonoko dies a horrific death after killing his lover to save her from a similar fate. While the figure of the abused sovereign at the centre of the narrative may be Charles, Caesar (as Oroonoko is renamed by his masters), or indeed somebody else entirely, its publication in the fateful year of 1688 meant the text was clearly implicated in the crisis of the moment. As with *Irish Tales*, timing is everything. The shocking end to the tale, which lacks any glimmer of hope for the future, anticipates the shift in tone that would come to characterise the romance in the Jacobite era.

Like Butler, Behn made use of real historical people and events but moulded them to fit her story.²⁷ To give added force to her narrative, in the opening pages of she insists that she was an eyewitness to the events of the narrative, even though many aspects of the narrative including the central figure of Oroonoko are either

²⁵ For one of the most influential of these readings see, Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early-Eighteenth Century Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 55-62.

²⁶ Richard Knoll, "'Tales of Love and Gallantry': The Politics of *Oroonoko*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (December 2004): 573-605.

²⁷ Many studies have explored the relation between *Oroonoko* and history, for an example, see, Katherine M. Rogers, "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Studies in the Novel* 20, no. 1 (1988): 1-15.

heavily modified or wholly invented. This self-aware, flexible attitude towards historical verisimilitude exhibited by both Behn and Butler was one of the markers of the Royalist Romance during and after the Restoration era, along with a growing tendency to theorise about the genre's claim to historicity. In Patterson's words, these authors "often devoted their prefaces to rather sophisticated discussions of romance as a genre, to fictionality as a means of mediating historical fact".²⁸ The first paragraph of her preface finds Butler doing precisely this, using distinctly gendered imagery to make the bold claim that "although I have cloath'd it in the Dress and Title of a Novel; yet (so far I dare speak on my own behalf, that) I have err'd as little from the Truth of the History, as any perhaps who have undertaken any thing of this Nature" (39). Butler thus presents *Irish Tales* as a kind of fictionalised truth, and however incoherent that formulation may appear to modern eyes it had its origins in a decades old theoretical approach to the romance.

According to the neoclassical theory of *vraisemblance*, popularised by the mid-seventeenth French romance author and *précieuse* Madeleine de Scudéry whose romances had so delighted the Caroline court, the truth conveyed by a romance resided not in its slavish adherence to historical accuracy but in its exemplification of current norms of virtuous behaviour.²⁹ Typically, Scudéry set her romances in the ancient classical world or near east with narratives drawn from respected historical sources such as Plutarch or Livy, but populated her works with characters that behaved like moral paragons of her own age and situated them within a recognisable

²⁸ Patterson mentions *Panthalia* and *The Princess Cloria* as the most explicit examples of this phenomenon. See, Patterson, 168.

²⁹ For a fuller discussion of the historical and social context surrounding Scudéry's conception of *vraisemblance* see, Anne E. Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 52-5.

seventeenth-century courtly milieu.³⁰ This form of fictionalised history proved enduringly popular with readers, even as it earned her the disdain of academicians like Nicholas Boileau. In particular Boileau objected to her insertion of ‘feminised’ love stories and excessively romantic language into historical narratives that had traditionally been male-dominated celebrations of martial heroism.³¹ This artful juxtaposition of contemporary mores and distant historical events pioneered by Scudéry was, however, the perfect vehicle to express otherwise dangerous political sentiments. Royalists and later Jacobites in Britain exploited this feature of the historical romance to mount a covert defence of their distinct vision of society. The structure of *Irish Tales* with its invented romance grafted on top of real historical events exemplifies the Scudérian provenance of the Royalist Romance, as does Barker’s roman-era romance *Exilius*. Contemporary readers would have recognised in Butler’s claim that she had not “foisted” on her readers “anything which might be injurious to the truth” (41) a well established, politically-inflected approach to romance narrative.

The rarefied social milieu that is the focus of *Irish Tales* reflects the French-influenced mores of the Royalist Romance in Britain. The narrative of *Irish Tales* all but ignores the existence of anyone beyond the royal court, with the people outside it appearing only in the unflattering description of a “shouting throng of the Vulgar” (73). Conversely, popular Jacobitism in Ireland, in the form of Gaelic-language poetry and song, celebrated the Stuarts as messianic liberators of the common people.³²

³⁰ See, for example, Scudéry’s popular roman-era romance, *Clélie, Histoire Romaine* (Paris, 1654-1661).

³¹ Duggan, 122-30.

³² For examples of Irish Jacobite poetry, see, Breandán Ó Buachalla’s unrivalled study, *Aisling Ghéar: Na Stiobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn, 1603-1788* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clochomhar, 1996), and for more on the social context of Irish Jacobitism see, Ó Ciardha, *Ireland and the Jacobite Cause*.

Furthermore, in a jarringly anachronistic touch for Viking-age Ireland, the assignations between the lovers in *Irish Tales* take place in the seclusion of a formal garden or arbour of a kind to be found in the grounds of a contemporary palace or country house. Barker's 1715 romance *Exilius*, ostensibly set in the roman era, includes an equally incongruous formal garden that she spends several pages describing in detail, and her first work, the anonymously published *The Amours of Bosvil and Galesia* (1713), is narrated from within "St. Germain's Garden". The palace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye was home to the Jacobite court where Barker had lived for more than a decade after the Glorious Revolution. These depictions of a romanticised courtly world would have appealed to Jacobites amongst the gentry and upper classes, the kind of "Gentlemen and Ladies" Curll wished to attract to his Tunbridge Wells shop, mentioned in an advertisement appended to the 1719 edition of *Milesian Tales*.³³ The reality, however, was that in the decades after the Glorious Revolution the Jacobite elite in Britain and Ireland continued to lose ground, socially, politically, and economically even as the country thrived. In these difficult circumstances, Jacobites clung to the belief that since only a Stuart could rule as the rightful sovereign Britain's material progress masked a deeper malaise.

Allusions to a distinctly Jacobite iteration of Stuart ideology can be discerned in the representation of the Viking conquerors' rule in *Irish Tales*. In the opening pages the narrator states that the Danes had subdued "all but a few who knew not how to bow their necks in subjugation to any but a lawful Prince, or stoop to any thing but their free liberties, and obedience to their own Kings" (43). The phrase 'a lawful Prince' recalls the common Jacobite accusation that William of Orange had usurped

³³ Kathryn R. King, "The Novel Before Novels," *Eighteenth-Century Genre and Culture* eds. Denis Todd and Cynthia Hall (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 43.

the lawful king of Britain and Ireland, a claim that gained renewed currency in the wake of the Hanoverian succession in 1714. This focus on the legality of kingship is, according to Howard Erskine-Hill, “the characteristic emphasis of almost all the Jacobite pamphlets”.³⁴ The reference to ‘their own Kings’ on the other hand evokes the notion that the Stuarts were the rightful *native* kings of Britain (and Ireland, following Keating’s Milesian genealogy), casting William of Orange and the Hanoverians as foreign opportunists. Jacobites warned that the danger posed by such unlawful kingship was not simply political, but moral. By disrupting the natural order, the illegitimate king degraded the social and moral fabric of society from the top down, allowing all manner of depravities to develop, as Butler demonstrates in *Irish Tales* through the character of Turgesius.

In Butler’s narrative Turgesius, the Danish king of Ireland, is presented as a crude “Letcher” (66) given over to luxury and lust, a familiar picture of illegitimate rule. He views the crown merely as another valuable possession, revealing an acquisitiveness that marks him out as unfit for kingship by the moral codes of the romance. This mercantilist outlook also shapes his attitude towards Dooneflaith, whom he covets as just another object that will bring him wealth and power, saying at one point, “love only shall be the currant Coin, and that I’ll lavish to acquire my ends” (51). Jacobites would have recognised in the Viking king’s anachronistic sentiment an allusion to the commercialism associated with the Whig faction in the present day.³⁵ High Tories and Jacobites expressed particular outrage that this mercantilist attitude had infiltrated the social and private realms. In *Reflections upon*

³⁴ Howard Erskine-Hill, “Literature and the Jacobite Cause,” *Modern Language Studies* 9, no. 3 (Autumn, 1979): 17.

³⁵ Twenty years later Eliza Haywood would invoke the same tropes in her anti-Walpolean romance *Adventures of Eovaai* (London, 1736), in which the tyrannical Ochihatou (Walpole) is characterised by boundless lust, ambition, and avarice.

Marriage (1700) Mary Astell warns women that marriages based solely on the man's economic interests corrupt the institution and produce unhappy unions. And in a politically charged analogy that deploys the tropes of romantic Jacobitism, she likens the marriage contract between man and wife to the sacred and unbreakable bond between the sovereign and the people. Significantly, however, she grants women, who must otherwise show complete obedience to their husbands and parents, the freedom to refuse an unsuitable match since a husband is a "Monarch for Life".³⁶

Dooneflaith's treatment by Turgesius and her father reduces her to the status of chattel to be exchanged and haggled over, debasing the relationship between husband and wife, father and child, and sovereign and people, representing in microcosm the damage inflicted by Turgesius's reign. In the face of this humiliation, Dooneflaith rejects the material symbols of Turgesius's corrupt rule asserting that, in the grand tradition of the heroine of romance, her love alone is the arbiter of genuine sovereignty. She vows to Murchoe that regardless of Turgesius's power over her "not all the Diadems in the World, not all the Monarchs on the Earth shall put you from my Heart; there you, and none but you shall Reign" (54). She will remain constant to her true sovereign regardless of who wears the crown, the image of steadfast Jacobite loyalty to the Stuarts.

In spite of Dooneflaith's unswerving loyalty to Murchoe, it becomes apparent over the course of the work that like the Jacobites of Ireland and Britain she cannot rely on her prince to protect her and must act as her own advocate and defender. In the face of Turgesius's coercive power (and the collusion of her father), Dooneflaith repeatedly deflects his advances proving herself to be politically-astute and independent-minded. Ó Gallchóir stresses the unusual degree of agency Dooneflaith

³⁶ Mary Astell, *Reflections upon Marriage*, 3rd ed. (London, 1706), 31.

exhibits in the narrative, noting the power afforded her “virtuous eloquence” by the plot, which she uses to persuade Turgesius to act in her interests rather than his own.³⁷ In *Exilius* Barker explores similar terrain showing how women can define themselves positively within the patriarchal power structure of the chivalric romance by constructing feminine virtue as a source of inner strength. In Books IV and V of *Exilius*, the sensible and resourceful character of Scipiana must balance the competing demands of her virtue, her obligation to her lover Exilius, and the lustful attention of the Egyptian king to convince the king to spare Exilius’s life.³⁸ Like Dooneflaith, she shows her moral strength by remaining true to the values of modesty and virtue even under duress.

While Dooneflaith is in many ways a typically refined and feminine heroine of romance she also exceeds the paradigm at crucial moments, proving herself not merely unwaveringly virtuous and constant but also physically courageous.³⁹ When Turgesius surprises the lovers consoling one another in Dooneflaith’s chambers, she physically intervenes to protect Murchoe from the king’s wrath even though Turgesius is wielding a sword: “Dooneflaith fearing the loss of her lov’d Murchoe, catches hold of Turgesius’s Arms, by which means she gave Murchoe opportunity to get within him, and disarm him” (56). Murchoe’s churlish response is to chide her for robbing him of the chance to free Ireland from tyranny by killing Turgesius and taking the crown for himself, declaring “how inglorious have you made my Name!” (56). The implication is that her display of bravery has emasculated him, spoiling his

³⁷ Ó Gallchóir, 30.

³⁸ Jane Barker, *Exilius: or, The Banish’d Roman* (London, 1715).

³⁹ Dooneflaith’s bravery links her to the figure of the *femme forte* or heroic woman, which British royalists in exile during the Civil War adopted from French romance and re-emerged with the accession of Queen Anne. See, Carol Barash, *English Women’s Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32-4.

chance to prove his martial prowess as the hero of romance should. Yet, if Dooneflaith exceeds her role as a romantic heroine, Murchoe despite his protestations shows himself to be something less than the stalwart masculine hero.⁴⁰ Twice in the work he dons women's clothing, once to woo Dooneflaith in secret and a second time as one of a troop of cross-dressing Irish soldiers who disguise themselves in order to launch a surprise attack on Turgesius and his men. Male cross-dressing is a common enough trope in romance but Murchoe is also prone to displays of excessive emotion usually coded as feminine in the literature of the period. These histrionics reach comical proportions when, believing Dooneflaith has forsaken him, he throws himself melodramatically onto his bed "where he pour'd out such Tears, such Sighs, and Complaints, that he drew moisture from the Eyes of all who look'd in at the Keyhole of the Door to see what he did" (78).

Although Murchoe's failure to live up to the traditional role of hero is presented in a light-hearted way for the most part, it would also have brought up some uncomfortable parallels for Irish Jacobites. After his confrontation with Turgesius, Murchoe flees into voluntary exile, in a development that recalls James II's escape to France. The idea of exile was central to Jacobite literature, so much so that Barker makes it the dominant theme of her romance *Exilius*, a choice undoubtedly influenced by her experience living with the Jacobite court in France. In her narrative all the many couples suffer through separation, and exile is generally the result either of unjust persecution or some tragic misunderstanding. Butler's treatment of exile is

⁴⁰ Butler's fluid representation of gender in *Irish Tales* may owe something to the notoriously unconventional treatment of gender in the writing of seventeenth-century royalist Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. For more on Cavendish's unusual representation of gender see, Sophie Tomlinson, "'My Brain the Stage': Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy of Female Performance," in *Women, Texts and Histories: 1575-1760*, eds Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), 134-163.

rather different. Instead of following Murchoe, the supposed hero, into exile the focus remains on Dooneflaith, the woman he has left behind unprotected. It is hard to avoid the impression that he has temporarily abandoned his role as hero-prince, leaving his lover at Turgesius's mercy just as James had abandoned Ireland to Williamite wrath after his defeat at the Battle of the Boyne in 1691.⁴¹

The consequences of Murchoe's flight play out in passages that see Butler deliberately evoking the bleak contemporary reality for Irish supporters of the Stuarts. Furious that Murchoe has escaped, the pagan king vents his wrath on the Catholic Church because he believes it may offer Murchoe refuge. Butler makes it plain that the violence committed by Turgesius's men should be read in religious terms as sacrilege, describing how they "put to Death all [the Catholic] Priests, and plac'd Heathen Lay-Abbots in every Cloister" (58). To compound the insult, the wealth seized from the churches and monasteries by "those Sacrilegious Danish Heathens" (68) is used to redecorate Turgesius's gaudy palace. The details of the attacks on the church are drawn from Keating's grisly account of the Viking raids in *Foras Feasa* and Butler does not flinch in her representation in spite of the danger that her words might be read not merely as historical description but as a critical comment on contemporary conditions in the country. For hovering over these descriptions is the reality of the effects of the Penal Laws in present day Ireland, a glaringly obvious point of connection that only the fictional 'dress' of the work serves to avert.⁴²

Daringly, Butler allows Dooneflaith to give voice to the outrage of the Irish people,

⁴¹ The Glorious Revolution was far from bloodless in Ireland where many thousands fought and died for James's right to the throne. The perceived cowardice of James's flight was particularly difficult for his Irish followers to accept. See, Ó Ciardha (82-4).

⁴² The reviled Penal Laws institutionalised catholic disenfranchisement. The laws were inconsistently enforced in Ireland through the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but during periods of unrest or protestant unease, as in the wake of a Jacobite rebellion, they were applied with renewed vigour. See, Ó Ciardha, 27-30.

past and present, when she responds to attempts to coerce her into marriage to Turgesius by exclaiming, “What, Wed a Tyrant! one whose wicked Hands have ransacked our Holy Temples, demolish’d all our Altars!” (63). Dooneflaith explicitly couches the plundering of the church and her own forced marriage in the same terms: as rape.

Erskine-Hill identifies the use of rape symbolically to represent William’s accession as a theme that resonated through all forms of Jacobite literature in the decades that followed the revolution.⁴³ In Gaelic-language *Aisling* poetry from later in the century the female embodiment of Ireland was habitually portrayed, like Dooneflaith, as the victim or potential victim of sexual violence at the hands of Ireland’s enemies. Butler emphasises the aggressive, predatory nature of Turgesius’s passion for Dooneflaith, which becomes “so fierce and unruly in his Breast, that nothing but the enjoyment of Dooneflaith could allay it, or give him one moment of ease; he resolv’d in himself, nothing should impede his Desires” (58). But if the threat of violence in this description is explicit, Dooneflaith is equally ferocious in her defence of her sexual virtue. Indeed, she shows herself to be much more than the passive symbol of Ireland’s suffering, expressing herself in strikingly robust and violent terms: “I’ll pierce my Heart and spurt the reaking stream full in his hated face” (61). In the strength and determination she draws from her virtue, Dooneflaith disrupts the usual dichotomy between female power and moral purity common to eighteenth-century literature, including Jacobite writing.

In fact, Dooneflaith’s dramatic claim that she will defend her virtue even to the point of death recalls the actions of a much older symbol of virtuous, violated womanhood, the Roman matron Lucretia, who commits suicide by stabbing herself in

⁴³ Erskine-Hill, 15-6.

the chest after she is raped by a member of the tyrannical Tarquin dynasty. In allegorical terms, the rape of Lucretia symbolically corresponds to the Tarquins' usurpation of her country with sexual violence functioning as a signifier for political misrule. Lucretia's dignity in the face of this violation sets off a chain of events that ultimately results in the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome and the foundation of the Roman Republic.⁴⁴ By alluding to this story, Butler implies that Dooneflaith's stubborn refusal to surrender her chastity has significance beyond the private realm of virtue; it is symbolic of Ireland's moral rejection of the Danes' illegitimate rule, a message that exemplifies the Jacobite ethos.

Nevertheless, while the expulsion of the Danes superficially mirrors that of the Tarquin dynasty, the denouement of *Irish Tales* strikingly lacks the sense that the moral order of the universe has been restored. Turgesius's reign ends ignominiously at the hands of the cross-dressing Irish forces slightly more than halfway through the work, resolving the central conflict of the first phase of the narrative. It would appear at this point that Dooneflaith's trials are at an end, but no sooner is Turgesius dispatched than a new impediment to the young lovers' happy ending arises and for the remainder of the narrative the consummation of their relationship is deferred again and again. It is no longer the foreign Dane, Turgesius, who stands in their way but Dooneflaith and Murchoe's own fathers. The emphasis therefore shifts from a national conflict to a generational one that threatens the future stability of the Irish monarchy. This may have been conceived, as Kathryn King speculates regarding

⁴⁴ Though the Lucretia myth may seem odd choice for a Jacobite given its association with the republicanism, both royalists and Whigs made use of it during the seventeenth century. Dryden alluded to it in his anti-Dutch, pro-Stuart play of 1672-3, *Amboyna or the Cruelties of the Dutch to the English Merchants*, which casts the republican Dutch in the role of the corrupt Tarquins. Additionally, in the Irish context the reflexive British habit of equating Catholicism with tyrannical absolutism would not have applied given that Catholics were the disenfranchised majority in the country.

Barker's *Exilius*, as a response to the succession crisis precipitated by the death of Queen Anne in 1714.⁴⁵ Significantly, whereas Jacobites would have regarded Dooneflaith's defiance of the illegitimate authority of a usurper as heroic, their strictly hierarchical ideology meant resisting parental authority could not be justified in the same manner.

In the wake of Turgesius's death, Dooneflaith's father begins plotting his path to the high kingship and forbids her from marrying Murchoe, who is the son of his rival. In response Murchoe's father Boriámh, beloved hero of Irish history, exhorts his heart-broken son to forget Dooneflaith and focus instead on the family's royal ambitions, saying "Think on a Crown, think of a Monarch's Power, and see how poorly Love will shew to these" (83) – hardly sentiments suitable for a heroic romance. Murchoe reluctantly submits to filial duty and, due to a misunderstanding, publicly disavows his love for Dooneflaith. Dooneflaith, on the other hand, while she obeys her father's wishes remains ever faithful to Murchoe in her heart. By turning his back on Dooneflaith, even temporarily, Murchoe cedes the moral authority to a fractious older generation. In the final battle while he acquits himself well he dies anticlimactically of "an unlucky accidental Arrow" (92) without ever taking up the mantle of future king.⁴⁶ Dooneflaith herself expires at the news of Murchoe's death, constant to her lover till her last breath, and the hopes for Ireland's future die with her. Boriámh is killed and Dooneflaith's ambitious, opportunistic father retakes the throne. With no heir to inherit the high kingship, the Irish may have won the war but

⁴⁵ For a discussion of *Exilius* in the context of the succession crisis and Jacobite politics more generally see, King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career 1675-1725* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150-4.

⁴⁶ Unlike the nationalist renderings of Boriámh's victory that came to the fore later in the eighteenth century, Butler's narrative does not erase the less than heroic reality that the army Irish forces defeated at the Battle of Clontarf included not only Danes but also Irishmen.

there is a sense that the opportunity to restore order to the country and bring about a lasting peace has been squandered.

The thwarted consummation of the central romantic pairing in *Irish Tales* can be read as a symbolic analogue to the dashed hopes of a restoration of the Stuart monarchy in the wake of the failed Jacobite rebellion. In the later parts of her semi-autobiographical *Galesia* trilogy, published in 1723 and 1726, Barker similarly dispenses with the conventional romantic ending. Her central character chooses to remain a spinster, reframing it as a positive state of virgin independence. In her political biography of Barker, King suggests that if in the symbolic language of Jacobitism legitimate consummation of marriage is the positive counterpart to the illegitimate usurpation that is rape, then Barker's unconventional ending might be viewed as an exploration of what happens when that happy resolution is no longer available as an option.⁴⁷ Other female writers, however, chose deliberately not to seek a positive resolution to this faltering dynamic. Rachel Carnell reads Delarivier Manley's tragedy, *The Royal Mischief* (1696), as a critique of the royalist problem of James's weakness as a monarch, remarking that "Manley's decision to end *The Royal Mischief* with no obvious heir [...] suggests that she saw no heroic saviour for her country either in the exiled James II or in his son".⁴⁸ The ending of *Irish Tales*, written twenty years later, seemingly comes to the same bleak conclusion.

Yet Butler's portrayal of the Irish kings as selfish, unworthy of the office, and constantly squabbling amongst themselves suggests a more pointed critique of the country's political prospects. In her willingness to present a sceptical vision of medieval Ireland's system of elected kingship Butler anticipates a question that would

⁴⁷ King, 161-2.

⁴⁸ Rachel K. Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 104.

divide antiquarians later in the century.⁴⁹ Did the unstable nature of the electoral kingship leave Ireland chronically divided and too weak to mount a united defence against the Norman Conquest a century later, thereby setting up centuries of colonial subjugation? For Keating the desire to claim Boriámh as a national hero meant minimising this potential line of interpretation,⁵⁰ but on this divisive issue Butler breaks with him. The choice may in part reflect Butler's embrace of Jacobite values in this instance over those of Irish proto-nationalism. For the Jacobites, the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, which lay at the heart of their ideology, opposed any form of 'conditional' or elected kingship as a gross violation of a sacred institution whose authority derived from God alone. The alternative to a divinely ordained king was not a government imbued with authority by the people but a system which in Paul Monod's words "would prevent the establishment of any sort of ultimate authority; the result must be party strife, an endless struggle for domination."⁵¹ The principal example of elected kingship in this period was of course William of Orange, who rose to the position of Stadtholder after an election by delegates of the states and provinces of the Netherlands in 1672 and was 'invited' to take the British throne by the British parliament in 1688. Thus although it ends with a declaration that the Irish had defeated their 'mortal Enemy' the Danes, at the close of *Irish Tales* the reader is left with a lingering feeling that in an independent Ireland with an elected king any peace will be fleeting. Perhaps, in Butler's view, only a divinely ordained king, a Stuart king, could permanently stem the country's regional rivalries and bring its competing

⁴⁹ See, Clare O'Halloran, "The Triumph of 'Virtuous Liberty': Representations of the Vikings and Brian Boru in Eighteenth-Century Histories," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 22 (2007), 151-63.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 157-8.

⁵¹ Paul Kléber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People: 1688-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 17-20.

interests into a state of peaceful coexistence? But if the text is open to this reading, it provides little hope that this is an imminent or even a likely prospect.

With the ambivalent tone of the final pages, it is clear that Butler's purpose is not simply to add to the stock of Jacobite propaganda. Instead *Irish Tales* reflects, somewhat fatalistically, on the vagaries of Irish history within the framework of a recognisably Jacobite typology. Indeed, if *Irish Tales* demonstrates the importance of the chivalric values of duty, loyalty and obligation, it also concedes how rarely even those of royal blood live up to them. Only Dooneflaith consistently embodies these heroic ideals. By placing Dooneflaith at the centre of the moral order of her romance, Butler reorients the heroic romance around a feminised model of heroism. The relocation of power within the sphere of women's social and cultural milieu provided one avenue through which Jacobite women could respond to the gradual decline of the military hopes of the Stuarts while also claiming for themselves a measure of subjective autonomy.